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ABSTRACT

An intergenerational literacy program addresses the needs of adult students enrolled in remedial reading classes at a community college. Their classroom behavior marked by passivity or anxiety, these students are usually able to derive the surface meanings of familiar text, but demonstrate little analytic or reflective thinking about what was read. The program consists of a workshop series that uses children's literature to promote reading development. Reading comprehension strategies that promote analytic thinking and reflection are demonstrated and practiced using the children's books. At the end of the workshop session, the children's books are borrowed for home reading with children. At the following session, parents share their home reading experiences. Peer practice, group discussion, and sharing of home experiences are key features of the program. The program's overall aim is to provide enjoyable learning experiences that adult family members can replicate with their children at home to the benefit of both generations. As an unanticipated outcome of the program, signs of outreach to a wider community were noted. Several participants have disseminated the program to neighborhood or church groups, summer reading programs, and homeless shelters. (RS)

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Program Descriptions and Research Findings: The Parent Readers Program and its Adaptations in Schools and Adult Literacy Settings

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This presentation will describe an intergenerational model that aims to develop literacy abilities and dispositions in both adult and child generations, and that seeks to empower parents to serve as literacy resources to their children. In terms of social capital, or social relationships that serve as resources for important life activities, the program helps parents increase the resources for literacy they can offer their children. In addition, it provides the adults with a social network of other adults who can share their concerns and enlarge their perspectives. In Dr. Ruth Nickse's typology, the program is type 3; it provides direct services to urban, low income adults, indirect to children.. It is an intervention designed to break the cycle of underachievement so often seen in those families.

The program consists of a workshop series that uses children's literature to promote reading development. Reading comprehension strategies that promote analytic thinking and reflection are demonstrated and practiced using the children's books in the workshops. The children's texts, while simple picture books, were selected for their potential in stimulating rich discussion; structured discussions about isues raised by the books also occurred in the workshops. At the end of the workshop session, the appealing, interesting children's books are borrowed for home reading with children. At the following session, parents shared their home reading experiences. Thus peer practice, group discussion, and the sharing of home experiences were key features of the participatory workshop sessions. The sessions are informal. They also became the first occasions for these adults to share and discuss books with peers in a nonjudgmental setting. The program's overall aim was to provide enjoyable learning experiences that adult family members could replicate with their children at home to the benefit of both generations.

Before describing the details of the original model, the Parent Readers Program, and its various adaptations for schools and adult literacy settings, let me provide some orientation to the rationale of the program.

Program Rationale

First: as to literacy: The program takes a broad view of literacy as points along a continuum, or a levels of literacy perspective that conceptualizes literacy as the exercise of competencies needed to "function in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential" (Kirsch & Jungeblut, 1986, NAEP Profile of Young Adults) in other words being able to use communication- reading, writing, listening, speaking - to meet their personal and social goals Literacy is regarded as occuring in a social context and occuring in many different settings of various degrees of formality, some overtly instructional, some not, both in school and out.

Second, the instructional pedagogy of the program operationalizes cognitive theories of reading which view the reader as an active constructor of meaning and meaning-making as an interaction between reader and text (see Anderson *et al*, 1985, Singer) in which cognitive and metacognitive.strategies for generating meaning are employed. These strategies such as predicting, questioning, accessing background knowledge, comprehension monitoring, and relating the text to personal experience - were used to promote both text-based inquiry and wide-ranging discussions in the workshops. They are taught in the program as generic strategies, applicable to both child and adult texts.

Third, with respect to parent-child reading relationships, our conviction that teaching adults strategies to use with their children would be productive in terms of the child's development was based on theories of adult mediation of children's learning such as Vygotsky's, as well as various ethnographic studies such as those of Cochran-Smith (1984) and Snow (1983) in the US. Also based on research showing reading gains for tutors as well as recipients of tutoring, benefits in terms of adult reading development are expected from the parent-child interaction as well.

Fourth, working within the tradition of adult education which recognizes the rich background of life experience that adults bring to a learning situation, private, familial

experiences and goals - such as wanting to do the best for one's child - are incorporated into the program.. By incorporating personal experiences and particularly the parenting experiences of learners into the workshops and discussion, the program both builds on and respects their strengths. We assume the usefulness for cognitive development and social agency - acting in the world - of making connections between family life and personal goals on the one hand and literacy enhancement on the other. A correlary to the focus on learner participation and strengths is that the role of instructor becomes one of facilitator and co-learner rather than top-down teacher.

Fifth, and also contributing greatly to the positive nature of the program is the factor of enjoyment. Following theories of intrinsic motivation, the program endorses enjoyment as a motivational condition for adult learning in the workshops and as facilitating the transmission of learning to their children at home. For example, children's literature was selected as the medium of instruction because it is enjoyable and interesting to adults as well as children. In addition, the informal social atmosphere of the workshops and the group interaction is similarly meant to stimulate enjoyment. Also, the program helps adults create enjoyable reading relationships with children, which in turn stimulates an increasing involvement with reading on the part of the child.

As indicated (SHOW TRANSP 1) the program's rationale may be summarized as follows. The model:

- builds on adult motivation and strength
- recognizes adults in their familial role
- uses "good reader" theory
- provides a social context for reading in the workshops and at home
- use interesting and engaging reading material
- links instruction and enjoyment
- consists of experiential workshops
- empowers adults by giving them tools to help others as well as themselves

Program Descriptions

The program originated in 1986 for adult students at a community college and has since been adapted elsewhere. As indicated on the transparency (SHOW TRANSP 2), program sites include a:

- Community College (The original Parent Readers Program)
- Family Reading in the Schools (Newark NJ; San Diego, CA.; Brooklyn, NY; Indianapolis,IN)
- Family Reading in Adult Literacy Settings
- Family Reading in the Workplace
- The Parent Readers Program Reaches Out - a family shelter program
- Family Reading in Libraries, Day Care Centers and Preschools

As originally developed by Dr. Ellen Goldsmith of New York City Technical College/CUNY and myself, the program addressed the needs of adult students enrolled in remedial reading classes at that college. Their classroom behavior marked by passivity or anxiety, these students could be classified as "mid-literates," usually able to derive the surface meanings of familiar text, but demonstrating little analytic or reflective thinking about what was read. One area that was positively charged for these adult students and that they subjected to considerable analysis was the welfare of their children. Their eagerness to obtain advice from their instructors about child development or school achievement was apparent.

The workshops for the Parent Readers Program introduced students to an array of children's books and reading strategies. Each followed a model in which the following activities took place (SHOW TRANSP 3):

1. Introductory Activities/Reporting on Reading at Home
2. Presentation of the Genre and Children's Book
3. Demonstration of the Reading Strategy
4. Paired Reading - which involves practicing the strategy with a partner

5. Group Discussion - a structured discussion which moves from responding to the strategy use, to relating the content to personal experience, then to generalizations about the book or topics discussed

6. Preparation for Reading to Children and Book Borrowing - An important feature of the Program is that provides access to books which many urban families lack.

To get an idea of the program in action, I will briefly show slides of the original and ongoing Parent Readers Program at New York City Technical College and also of one of the Family Reading in Schools programs.

(Parent Readers Program Slides shown with comment on the program model and on adult engagement and apparent enjoyment as contrasted with their previous apathy)

(Newark, NJ Family Reading in Schools slides shown of workshops in Abington Avenue School and of parent recognition ceremonies at Martin Luther King Jr. School. Comment on characteristics of urban district and parents, the negative.school experiences of many parents, the delight of parents receiving certificates recognizing their participation in Family Reading, and reading to children in the classroom as an additional feature of the school program.)

Throughout, In various ways throughout the workshops, participants were encouraged to ask themselves: What can I make of these children's stories? They were stimulated to bring their life experience, history, and language forms into the program as an essential part of it. For example, when discussing The Little Red Hen, participants quickly related the folktale to their own experience, some recognizing themselves in the story of the hen who had to do all the household work herself, others discussing ways to enlist the help of other family members in daily tasks. When discussing a book called *Bread, Bread, Bread*, a photographic round the world tour of its various forms, participants noted the omission of the characteristic bread of their native Puerto Rico. In both instances, participants did not merely take the text as given, but found connections and voiced critiques, activities characteristic of independent and critical readers.

A second major adaptation of the original model is directed to Adult Literacy Classrooms. In this adaptation, the model was expanded to include adult readings as well on a regular basis. Each of the workshops includes a children's book as before, an adult selection on the same general topic or theme, and a reading strategy applicable to both. A list of types of books, reading strategies and titles for the ten workshops in the curriculum are shown on the transparency (SHOW TRANSP 4 & 5.).

The curriculum model (SHOW TRANSP 6 & 7) provides for working with the children's book much as before, then repeating similar read aloud, strategy use and discussion activities with the adult selection, thereby providing opportunities for reinforcement and practice. This adaptation has a more elaborated component to prepare learners for reading at home to the child. Also, it integrates writing activities in more. Ellen Goldsmith and I have put our curriculum together in a publication for New Readers Press called *Family Reading: An Intergenerational Approach to Literacy*. which includes the workshop list and curriculum model you have seen.

This elaborated model has had much appeal for learners enrolled in adult literacy classes. At Brooklyn College/City University of New York, it has been used with a variety of levels of learners; all learned the strategies and were eager to read at home. The model has a great deal of flexibility. For the very beginning readers, wordless picture books in which the reader makes up a story for the picture sequence were most appealing, and the instructor read aloud most of the adult selections - both activities providing important oral language experiences for low literate adults..

Research Findings

The aim of the original program as well as its adaptations is to develop literacy abilities and dispositions in adult and child generations, through empowering adult caregivers to serve as literacy resources to their children. We collected self-report and interview data and also used observational techniques to document the program's impact. The results were both anticipated and unexpected

First, and most dramatically, in the Parent Readers Program at the college it became clear that participants were transformed in the workshops. They became active, lively individuals, eagerly discussing the children's books, sharing reactions, and practicing strategies. It was an astonishing contrast with other setting in which we had seen them, the remedial reading classes where apathy and poor performance were the norm. At home, they began reading more to their children and using the cognitive strategies; they also became interested in doing more reading themselves, thereby becoming reading role models for their children, and they applied the strategies to their own adult reading - even without specific instruction to do so.

Outcomes for the elementary school program have been similar. Parents are: reading more to their children and reading more themselves; they report greater confidence in reading aloud; they use questioning and other reading and discussion strategies when reading to their child in the classroom and at home. Teachers report increased interest in reading by the children. Book borrowing in the college and school programs is cited as an important feature of the program ; parents and children express gratification at having quality book available on a regular basis.

What the program appears to be doing in both these settings is helping these families establish the habit of reading. That is one of the major outcomes of the program. As one of women in the college program says: "Once you get into reading, it's like a habit. So you start reading. All of a sudden, let me read this on the way to work, on the way back." Another says: "Believe it or not, I think when I'm reading (to my child) I'm also learning. Even if its a simple story, I'm getting something out of it...It's like I'm building my vocabulary even if it's simple words."This factor of increased reading is of course terrifically important given the research that shows that people who read more tend to be better readers. And the effects do reach to all members of the family - other adults, other children in the family not just the school-age child also participate in the reading at home.

The adults are aware that Instruction in reading strategies has also helped them enlarge their concepts and beliefs about the nature of the reading process. One mother in the school program said: "I used to think reading was just reading; now I know it's thinking and questioning, too." Use of the reading strategies means, of course, that learners are acquiring the tools for independent, critical reading. Quality as well as quantity of reading has increased.

The second major outcome of the program is enjoyment. All participants - and instructors - and the children report enjoying the program and the children's books.. Frankly, that was obvious to us just from observation, as it probably was to you seeing the slides. I've talked about the importance of enjoyment as motivation for learning, but enjoyment has additional importance for the adults in the program because most of them have had negative experiences in school and did not associate reading or any sort of formal learning with pleasure. Now their views have changed. They are eager for more reading. " I think that by reading to my daughter it has helped me in a way that it's making me read more...See when I read to her, after I read to her, I want to read something. Something grown up." The children's books are a stimulus to adult reading.

A large part of the enjoyment comes from the reading relationships that parents have established with their children. Although many had read to their children before entering the program, they did not do so regularly and comfortably. Contributing to the pleasure is their new realization of their importance as significant adults in their children's educational lives, something they did not appreciate before, and also their greater understanding of their children. Here's a snapshot of one parent's situation:

(Sometimes:) "you don't really pay attention to your children. If you're caught up with your work and you're coming home and your daughter or son brings a book home and they start reading, you don't really pay attention because you're trying to wind yourself down from the day. Then what happened one day, when Nija was sitting there and she said she was going to read a book..I told her okay and I was looking at TV, I was just trying to

relax. When I heard her read, I never heard her read before..She started reading and that really shocked me because I was like this is my daughter. I was so proud. It made me so happy. When they started this program ..I wanted to be a part of it because this was a part of my child getting an education."

The reading time at home has meant an opportunity to pay attention to the child. Parents are attending to the child's reactions to stories, discovering the child's interests and abilities, becoming sensitive to the child's moods. In the workshop sessions, parents often report with pride on their child's accomplishments. The reading relationship has become a process for the parents of dscovering what their child is like.

It is important to note also that the program has functioned to avert or mitigate problematic situations for these adults. In the case of the community college students, often the first of their families to attempt higher education, the program counters the alienation that may occur when a family member, particularly a woman, moves into a new arena and leaves the family behind. The Parent Readers Program by extending services to the family enables the adult student to in effect bring her family with her. Similarly, in Family Reading in Schools,the positive nature of the program promotes responsiveness to the school culture on the part of parents whose own experiences were often negative. All of these factors work positively to promote enjoyment or to avert discomfort.

The third major type of outcome of the program relates to empowerment or social agency, that feeling of being able to act in the world. As has already been indicated, all of the adults are serving as literacy resources to their families; they have improved the literacy environment of their homes, a major aim of the program. As might be expected, all of the adults are making more use of that great community resource, the public library; many had not set foot inside the door before. The parents in the elementary school program are feeling more comfortable with school personnel, a promising sign since parental participation and proactiveness in school affairs are correlated with children's academic achievement.

Unanticipated, however, were the signs of outreach to a wider community. Several participants have disseminated the program to their neighborhood or church groups, establishing read-aloud sessions for children and using reading and discussion strategies. Others serve as school aides and use their new skills in the classroom. Two activist parents in a Newark school are organizing a summer reading program. Many of the parents in the school program have made plans to continue their own education. However, the most far-reaching effort was initiated by students at the community college. Distressed by the plight of the homeless in New York City, they are giving reading sessions to children in a family shelter in downtown Brooklyn. Confident of their skills and of their ability to help their own children, they are serving as literacy resources to homeless children and to the children's mothers who, learning from their example, are beginning to read to their children themselves.

The program model and conditions of implementation have precluded the use of test scores or statistical methods. Our evaluation measures reflect the size and nature of the program. There is much more fascinating and moving case study data that could be reported. All fall under one of the three major categories of outcome from the programs. In summary, what we have found are the increased habit of reading in terms of quantity and quality; enjoyment of reading; and personal empowerment of the participants. It is our belief that many implications follow from those outcomes.

END

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